

Brussels, 26 March 2008

Dear Foreign Minister

We would like to draw your urgent attention to the dire crisis occurring in the Gaza Strip and urge you to take action at your Gymnich meeting this week in Slovenia.

The Israeli government has imposed crippling restrictions on the movement and access of goods and people to and from Gaza since the Hamas take-over of Gaza in June 2007. As a result, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is now worse than it has been at any time since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967.

Water delivery and sewage infrastructure are on the point of total collapse. Our reports from Gaza indicate that homes have been flooded by sewage up to knee height around the Zeitoun area. Hospitals are also unable to function properly in the face of the fuel and medical shortages.

The impact on children of the blockade and of the conflict in general is particularly marked. Seventy percent of Gaza's children suffer from post traumatic stress disorder and 10% of children under 5 are suffering abnormalities in their growth and development.

***As an immediate, short-term step to ease the crisis in Gaza, we urge the EU to put pressure on Israel to widen its narrow definition of what constitutes essential humanitarian assistance. Normal levels of fuel imports and electricity supplies should be restored.***

The Gazan economy is no longer on the brink of collapse – it has collapsed. Entire sectors have ground to a halt. The private sector has been devastated. Ninety-five percent of Gaza's industrial operations are suspended.

***The EU should take steps to secure the reopening of the Gaza crossings: the full implementation of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access should be enforced.***

Despite Israel's legitimate security concerns, it also has legal obligations towards the Palestinian population as the occupying power.<sup>1</sup> The current restrictions constitute a collective punishment for the 1.5 million population of Gaza *and are illegal under international humanitarian law.*

The security of Israelis and Palestinians is indivisible: one depends on the other. However, as the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Karen AbuZayd, so clearly put it, 'hungry, unhealthy, angry communities do not make good partners for peace'.

***This situation is reversible if the EU and the rest of the international community act now. However, we cannot afford to wait. Unless the blockade ends now, it will be impossible to pull Gaza back from impending disaster. And even if the blockade is lifted, it will take years to repair the damage of the last nine months.***

We thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely

**Chris Bain**  
Director  
CAFOD

**Geoffrey Dennis**  
Chief Executive  
CARE International UK

**Daleep Mukarji**  
Director  
Christian Aid

**Susan Wright**  
Director  
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<sup>1</sup> Israel retains full control over the Gaza Strip's land border, its air space and territorial waters, and the movement of goods and people.

**Jeremy Hobbs**  
Executive Director  
Oxfam International

**Alfhild Petren**  
Dep. Secretary General  
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**Ken Caldwell**  
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**Justin Kilcullen**  
Director  
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CC: Javier Solana, EU High Representative for CFSP  
Marc Otte, EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process  
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